

April 23, 2002

***Support H.R. 3231, "Barbara Jordan Immigration Reform and Accountability Act"
to Overhaul the Immigration and Naturalization Service***

Dear Colleague:

We urge you to support H.R. 3231 which is bipartisan legislation to comprehensively overhaul the beleaguered Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). On April 10, 2002, the legislation overwhelmingly passed the Judiciary Committee with a vote of 32-2.

The need for overhauling the INS is undeniable. Americans regularly hear of the agency's latest blunder and observe an agency stumbling from one crisis to the next, with no coherent strategy of how to accomplish its missions. Consider these facts about the performance of today's INS: a backlog of 5 million adjudicated petitions for immigration benefits force foreign nationals trying to play by the rules to wait in limbo for years. Furthermore, most of the several million undocumented foreign nationals are likely to never be deported. At least 300,000 foreign nationals ordered removed by immigration judges have absconded and cannot be found by the INS.

Successive administrations, both Democratic and Republican, have sought to heal the INS's woes through money and internal reorganizations like the administration is currently proposing. The agency's budget has almost quadrupled in the last decade to \$5.5 billion this year. Successive internal reorganizations have resulted in an organizational chart more convoluted than the tax code. The time for administrative band-aids has passed.

Barbara Jordan's U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform recognized in 1997 that the agency's problems were not a lack of funds or a question of who reported to whom, but a weakness inherent in INS's structure. The Commission found that the INS suffered from "mission overload" because of the conflict between the INS's missions of enforcing our nation's immigration laws and providing adjudication and other services to legal foreign nationals.

Our legislation builds on the Commission's conclusions by abolishing the INS and creating two separate bureaus in the Justice Department to handle the dual immigration functions – one led by a law enforcement professional to enforce our immigration laws and one led by an expert in benefits adjudication to provide immigration benefits to legal immigrants.

A new Associate Attorney General who handles only immigration affairs supervises and resolves conflicts between the two bureaus, thereby raising these issues to the level and attention that they deserve within the Department of Justice. The legislation also creates a new Office of Children's Affairs to address the special needs of unaccompanied children in the United States. Furthermore, newly created positions will be responsible for ensuring accountability and that the bureaus effectively accomplish their law enforcement and benefits missions.

By enacting H.R. 3231, Americans will know its government can handle enforcing our immigration laws and efficiently deliver the citizenship and immigration services deserving of a nation that cherishes new immigrants.

If you have questions regarding this legislation, there is additional information on the Judiciary Committee's website or contact our staff, Lora Ries at x55727 (Majority) or Scott Deutchman x56906 (Minority).

Sincerely,

F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary

John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary

George W. Gekas
Chairman
Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims

Sheila Jackson Lee
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims